DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 455 882 JC 010 562

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TITLE	Collaborative Strategies for Working with Faculty Unions.
PUB DATE	2000-05-30
NOTE	12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (Austin, TX, May 28-31, 2000).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Administrative Policy; Administrative Problems; *College Faculty; *Community Colleges; Cooperative Planning; Educational Administration; Employer Employee Relationship; *Faculty College Relationship; Labor Demands; *Labor Relations; School Administration; *Teacher Rights; Two Year Colleges; *Unions
IDENTIFIERS	*Shoreline Community College WA

ABSTRACT

This paper shares some of Shoreline Community College's (Washington) means for bringing faculty and administrators together and creating successful, collaborative interactions. A political model of decision-making is included to help resolve conflicts before they become unmanageable. This model has four elements within it that together impact the resolution of a conflict: (1) the person(s) who influences the decision; (2) dynamics such as group cohesion, core leadership, trust and access; (3) resources available to each side; and (4) strategies used to influence the decision--persuasion, inducement, constraint/coercive. Along with having an understanding of how the political model works and how to use it, an administrator must be aware of what myths have biased his/her own response, including "unions are combative," "conflict is bad," "rules are known by all," and "everyone is equal." At Shoreline, training was offered for both administrators and faculty union representatives. A consultant was also hired to work with the president and vice presidents for one day to assess leadership style and teach more effective communication skills. Finally, a one-day workshop was held that included the faculty union executive body, deans, vice presidents, and president of the college. Shoreline has made a sincere effort to include the faculty union president in major decisions that would affect faculty on the campus. The author provides case studies for several scenarios: salary disparity, faculty evaluations, and renegotiating a contract. (Includes a 12-item reading list.) (EMH)

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Collaborative Strategies for Working with Faculty Unions

By Jean Hernandez, Ed.D.

Presented at the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD)
May 30, 2000

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Title and Presenter:

"Collaborative Strategies for Working with Faculty Unions" presented at the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) 2000 Conference on May 30, 2000. Dr. Jean Hernandez, Dean, Health Occupations & Physical Education, Shoreline Community College, 16101 Greenwood Ave. N., Room 2309, Seattle, WA 98133-5696. 206-546-4768. E-mail: jhernand@ctc.edu. Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, University of Washington (1996).

Purpose:

In an effort to assist community college administrators in establishing positive working relationships with their respective faculty unions, this paper shares some of Shoreline Community College's means for bringing faculty and administrators together and creating successful, collaborative interactions. In addition, the facilitator uses a political model of decision making to enhance your ability to be a proactive and influential administrator and resolve conflicts before they become unmanageable.

Importance:

1. Rather than learning to work with faculty unions "on the job," this paper offers administrators some specific skills and tools for working collaboratively with faculty unions.
2. To be successful administrators, one must learn to see conflict as a normal part of any work setting and use it as a barometer to decide if changes, improvements or corrections are needed. In the political model of decision making, conflict is used as a motivator.
3. By confronting one's own myths about faculty unions and exploring one's reactions to specific case studies (e.g., salary negotiations, faculty evaluations, and renewing the contract), administrators can begin to find new ways to respond to ongoing issues.

Audience:

Vice Presidents and Deans would benefit most from this paper because often they are on the front lines working directly with faculty and have the most direct influence. They also can maintain the close working relationships that allow them to hear what are the major concerns and/or frustrations for faculty, and thereby share that information with their supervisors or the top administrators.

Idea/Action:

The political model of decision making has four elements that together influence the resolution of a conflict. The first characteristic is who influences (makes) the decision. Are decisions driven from the top down or the bottom up? Are employees truly able to have voice in the

decision making process or are decisions made by those who have the power (e.g., position power)? By making decisions in partnership with faculty, administrators can create stronger relationships with faculty and gain more commitment.

The next charactertic includes four variables that are considered fluid because they can work independently of each other, but if the right combination is created, then there is a greater possibility of the outcome being agreeable to all parties involved. These four variables are: group cohesion, core leadership, trust, and access. For example, to avoid conflict an administrator would want an environment in which the faculty union has low group cohesion (might be seen in low participation), lacks or has no leadership, perceives a high trust relationship with the administration, and sees the administration as very accessible (can easily and openly share their concerns). The worse situation is one in which the faculty union has a high number of faculty participants, strong leadership, lacks or has no trust in the administration, and does not perceive the administration as listening nor acting on their concerns/issues. In this latter situation, one could expect a great deal of conflict between the faculty union and the administration that could become very confrontational.

The third element is the types of resources available to each side (faculty union versus administration). Are there tangible resources that could be used to influence the decision (e.g., position power, money, location of offices, use of newspaper, rallies, etc.)? Are there intangible resources that could be used (e.g., level of expertise, personal power, social relationships, etc.)? The more resources a group has (faculty unions or administrators), the more ability they have to drive/influence the outcome of the decision.

Additional Examples of Types of Resources:

- Governing boards
- Information (Books or Workshops)
- Information Network
- Legal policies/laws
- Location of Office
- Media--newspaper, TV, Internet, radio
- Money (control budget)
- Numbers
- Office Space
- Paid staff
- Groups linked by a common cause or issue

The final element is the strategies that are used to influence the decision. There are three types of strategies: persuasion, inducement, constraint/coercive. A persuasive strategy would be used when the decision maker is not vested in the outcome and is open to all perspectives. An example of a persuasive strategy would be someone using letter writing or a formal meeting as a means of influencing the decision. The letter or meeting would cover specific details, as well as pros and cons, to convince the decision maker that the person or group's idea or solution is the best. Inducement would be used when the decision maker is already leaning towards one side and needs more convincing data or information to change his/her mind. Speaking out through the campus newspaper, distributing a memorandum with the details, or presenting the issues at an open division meeting are some of the ways to building coalitions among various groups and gain more power to influence the final decision. A constraint/coercive strategy is used when an individual or group feels that drastic actions must be taken to change the course of the decision making process. This strategy would be represented by a group storming a closed meeting or holding a walkout. This strategy is often, though not always, used as a last resource. For a more indepth explanation of the key characteristics of the political model of decision making, please review the published thesis by Hernandez (1996).

Additional Examples of the Types of Strategies:

- Access to individuals
- Agenda control
- Boycotting
- Conferences
- Consciousness building
- Expanding the scope of conflict
- Following established rules
- Forums
- List of demands
- Media--newspapers, TV, Internet, radio
- Meetings--invited vs. crashing
- Posted signs or fliers
- Rallies
- Strike

Along with having an understanding of how the political model works and how to use it, the administrator needs to be aware of what myths have biased their own response. A brief list of some primary myths about working with faculty unions that could limit one's judgment include:

(a) Unions are combative.
(b) Conflict is bad.
(c) Rules are known by all.
(d) Everyone is equal.

To address each of these myths, one has to change one's way of thinking. For example, for (a) unions are combative, an administrator has to separate him/herself from the "personalities" and work with the issues being presented on the table. In addition, he/she has to establish effective communication styles. To address (b) conflict is bad, one needs to accept the fact that there will always be some type of conflict, but it is how one reacts to it that becomes the key issue. Administrators need to learn to "fight" fair and value all view points.

Item (c) rules are known by all is an inaccurate assumption because often individuals must "learn the rules" by observation or their own interpretation of what has occurred. By creating positive role models and mentors, the college can establish its own collaborative culture between the union and management. One also must remember that trust has to be built between these two groups, it is not automatically given. When new administrators are hired, they, too, must be taught to appreciate the feedback and contributions that the union makes to their campus, as well as work with them to resolve conflicts. At first administrators might find themselves being carefully watched—to see if they are sincerely wanting to create a partnership or are simply using a smoke screen. Therefore, one's actions must be sincere and authentic.

For item (d) everyone is equal, administrators need to be conscientious about their own stereotypes and biases, as well as the perceptions of those around them. Whenever possible, it is highly recommended that criteria be established that clearly articulates how and why a particular decision is being made. The more the "rules" are publicly stated and followed, the less employees are likely to call "foul." The bottom line is that all employees want to be treated respectfully and equally. The job of the administrator is to make that happen as often as possible.

Outcome:

- Participants will have a greater understanding of the political perspective model of decision-making (e.g., use of resources and strategies to influence change).
- Participants will learn specific techniques and strategies for working with faculty unions.
- Participants will gain a broader understanding of their own ability to be influential and dynamic leaders.

Implementation:

To ensure that everyone was using a clear communication style, training was offered for both administrators and faculty union representatives. A consultant, Ms. Rhonda Hilyer, was hired to work with the president and vice presidents for one day on assessing one's own style and learning more effective communication skills. Next, a one-day workshop was held that included the faculty union executive body, deans, vice presidents, and president of the college.

At least a year before the current contract was due for renewal, issue teams were formed that addressed key concerns for both faculty and management. The teams each had 2-4 faculty and 2-3 administrators. The areas developed for this negotiations cycle were workload, evaluation, distance education, and part-time faculty. Each team met twice a month and then submitted summary reports to the "negotiations team" that included the top level administrators and representatives from the faculty union executive board. The negotiations team met on a weekly basis or as needed.

Throughout the academic year, the faculty union president received a .333 release time each quarter. Even though the union president did not having voting privileges, he/she did sit at the table when the Board of Trustees held their monthly meetings and was on the agenda to provide the Board with an update on faculty issues, concerns, and/or accomplishments. In addition, the vice president of instruction held biweekly meeting with the union president to discuss workload and labor/management issues. The college has made a sincere effort to include the faculty union president in major decisions that would impact faculty on the campus. For example, two professional/technical program faculty asked that their workloads be reviewed because they felt that they were working longer contact hours per week than transfer degree faculty. Before the vice president of instruction made a final decision he/she discussed with the union president the impact on other faculty if their workloads were decreased.

Resources:

The following three case studies were used as part of the presentation. Participants were divided into small groups and addressed the questions under one of the case studies. Then the entire group was brought together to discuss each of them.

Case study #1 – Salary Disparity

The state legislature has mandated a raise for part-time faculty to address salary disparity issues statewide. At your campus the legislature will provide $198,000 in funding and has asked the College to match that with a minimum of 40% ($79,200) of general funds. The College has offered to match at 60% ($118,800). The vice president for human resources and vice president for business meet with the union president to discuss the details of how disparity will be addressed. They also explain that the College has a commitment to hiring more full-time faculty and would use those additional funds to make 3-5 conversions ($63,000-$105,000), depending on actual available funds. During the first meeting, everyone seems to be in agreement. After the initial meeting, the union president returns saying that he has been directed by the executive board to ONLY accept a 100% match from the College. Otherwise, there will be an impasse. During the following negotiations, the union president offers to survey the faculty and get their input. The College has historically had very few of the 155 faculty respond to surveys, so it was not surprising when less than 25% returned their surveys. Even though a majority of the

returned surveys supported a 100% match by the College, the results did not clearly represent the views of the faculty. After about four months of negotiating, the College agreed to match at 100%.

What type of strategies could the College administration use to get a greater representation of the faculty opinion on the campus? (possible responses listed below)

- Hold on the final decision until faculty returned from summer break and then meet with faculty through division meetings
- Offer several open forums for all faculty during the first week of the quarter to increase the representation in the decision making process
- Attend a union meeting and discuss the issues openly
- Establish a representative body to work on the salary disparity issue--to get a broader campus perspective
- Expand the scope of the conflict--involve other unions in the discussion (i.e., classified staff, grounds staff, etc.)
- Present a specific plan that details how many additional full-time faculty will be hired and how the part-time faculty disparity will be distributed across the four available steps/ranges.

How might the College have done a better job of informing the campus community of the issues on the table (impasse, limited funds/fiscal resources, need for more full-time faculty)? (possible responses listed below)

- Write a Pros/Cons letter to the College community
- Spent time educating the campus about the budget process and how dollars are spent
- Be more persuasive about the need to hire more full-time faculty and provide supportive data

Case study #2 – Faculty Evaluations

After faculty are granted tenure, they have to go through a post-tenure evaluation every third year. The current system focuses on the weaknesses of the faculty member and asks the unit administrator to write up an "action plan" that will address these weaknesses and place accountability for improvement on the faculty member. For some time now, faculty have felt that this system is archaic and does not acknowledge the wealth of expertise and content knowledge that they bring to the classroom. The accreditation process requires that a faculty evaluation system be in place on each campus, so this plan was implemented. Therefore, some faculty perceive this as something that the administration has "pushed on them." There are other issues that complicate the post-tenure process—some faculty feel it should only include the current year's information and data; some deans feel it is very biased against faculty, and it assumes all faculty are incompetent; in those departments where trust has been weak between the faculty member and unit administrator, a union representative is often asked to attend as an advocate for the faculty member. This plan has been in place for about three years and not likely

to change in the near future. For the last two years, a training session has been offered that is presented jointly by a union representative and the vice president for human resources. The post-tenure process includes student evaluations for all classes taught to fulfill a faculty member's 100% workload during fall and winter quarters, a self-evaluation by the faculty member, between 3-5 peer reviews (other tenured faculty within their department or from the general campus evaluating the person), a unit administrator's evaluation, and the completion of a portfolio with all the relevant data.

What are some strategies the unit administrator or College could use to improve the perception of this as a "negative" experience for faculty?

- Meet with fellow unit administrators to learn more fully about the history of the process, its intent, and how to engage the faculty in the process more
- Have an initial meeting with the faculty member at the beginning of fall quarter and explain in detail the process and state one's own expectations of why these evaluations are important and necessary (e.g., feedback loop for instructor; being able to assist or support the instructor in those areas having difficulty; opportunity to discuss student perceptions and needs, based on their feedback on the evaluations)
- Anonymously (unless receive permission to use his/her name) share some testimonials from faculty that had found the process to be a positive one
- Convey some of the success stories that have resulted from the discussions with faculty during the evaluation process
- Emphasize how these individualized discussions provide an opportunity to build relationships and learn more about the instructor's own personal classroom or instructional goals

How might the administration initiate a collaborative effort to improve or revise this post-tenure evaluation system?

- Bring it before a formalized body that discusses labor/contract issues
- Form a Task Force and establish a reasonable timeline to bring information back to the faculty and administration
- Ask faculty to share new ideas that they have heard about
- Hire a graduate intern to research what neighboring colleges are doing and collect samples of their process
- Run a pilot group after a new system has been created

Case study #3 – Renegotiating the Contract

The "contract" is negotiated every four years. The last time the contract was re-negotiated, the vice president for instruction was not included in the negotiating process because the newly hired president thought it would be less adversarial if that person was kept off the bargaining table.

The negotiations went pretty smoothly that year, but several things did get rushed through so that there would be no delay in getting the 1996 contract approved before the end of that academic year. One of the complaints was that the vice president for instruction should have been intimately involved in the process and that the administration got more pluses on their side of the table than the union.

Now it is the 1999-2000 academic year and the current contract will expire on July 1, 2000. The president has become more seasoned about faculty issues and the vice president for instruction position is currently vacant, so an interim is serving in that role. This time the negotiating team is composed of the vice president for business, vice president for human resources, the former vice president for instruction, and the current interim vice president for instruction. In the last six months a number of issues have bubbled to the surface—three sabbatical leaves were initially denied by the Board of Trustees, then later approved; workload issues were being debated in certain departments were there was disparity between full-time and part-time faculty; increased number of retirements/resignations had led to one third of the full-time faculty going through the tenure-track process which required tenured, full-time faculty participation; and the governance structure had forced faculty to spend more and more time doing committee work. Morale is low, and faculty are feeling overworked and unappreciated.

What strategies could have been implemented earlier in the year to address some of the faculty members' frustration? What could be done now to increase morale?

- Host a beginning of the year breakfast with the president and vice president of instruction for faculty that emphasizes the importance of working together and how much the college appreciates their expertise and commitment to students
- Distribute a campus wide letter from the president or vice president of Instruction acknowledging the good work of faculty and highlighting some of the significant contributions made by faculty
- Meet with the union to express appreciation and highlight faculty contributions
- Schedule faculty group or department meetings with the president and/or vice president of instruction
- Create a monthly Faculty Showcase on the Intranet
- Invite the faculty union president to meet with the vice president of instruction on a biweekly basis, and possibly meet with the president monthly or quarterly

How might the college structure a collaborative process for renewing the contract?

- Provide communications training
- Establish "Issue Teams"
- Have a "Negotiations Team" meeting on a regular basis
- Build strong coalitions with informal leaders on the campus and get their support
- Address several key issues each time the contract is negotiated that provides a win-win atmosphere

Summary:

As administrators, one must remember that just as conflict is part of the working environment, so faculty unions, for many campuses, are important components of the community college environment. One needs to continually work on building trust and listening to the faculty. One also needs to maintain a positive attitude—think of each challenge as an opportunity to grow and work together to resolve the issue. Administrators must learn to work with the faculty union, not against it. At the same time, each victory, regardless of how small, should be celebrated.

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